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ABSTRACT

Demand for school reform continues to be characterized by a cry to adopt new leadership behaviors and change the preparation of school leaders. Once hired, new school leaders are confronted by the weight of tradition and history in their new jobs. This paper reports on an investigation of the impact of these socialization practices on new assistant principals, particularly women graduates of one leadership preparation program. The paper states that the investigation examined the way in which these women were inducted into school leadership. Each graduated from a newly designed preparation program built around state and national standards, focused on teaching and learning as the central role of schools, and committed to collaborative approaches as the best way to achieve shared goals. It explains that because the study subjects were women, the investigation also explored the impact that gender-associated leadership preferences had on their socialization. The paper notes that preliminary data were collected when the students graduated from the program, and two years following graduation. After each student had completed a second year as a school leader, they were resurveyed. It states that a grounded theory approach was used to analyze student responses. The study in the paper found that during preparation of these new school leaders, the centrality of teaching and learning, democratic leadership, attention to relationships, and decision-making (contextual and grounded in an ethic of care) were emphasized. The paper recounts many examples of the thought provoking, feminine leadership style these program graduates employed. (Contains 65 references.) (BT)

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Breaking the Bonds: Women School Leaders Confront the Effects of Socialization

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Demand for school reform continues to be characterized by a cry to adopt new leadership behaviors and change the preparation of school leaders (Murphy, 1999; Schneider, 1999; Murphy & Hallinger, 1992; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989; University Council for Educational Administration, 1987). National standards suggested preparation programs inclusive of core knowledge, problem-based, and grounded in practice (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996).

Once hired, new school leaders are confronted by the weight of tradition and history in their new jobs (Hartzell, Williams & Nelson, 1995; Marshall, 1992). They are often counseled to adopt "old" norms about priorities and decision-making. Some find that to gain acceptance they must adhere to values and leadership behaviors counter to those that attracted them to school leadership or were espoused in their preparation (Hartzell, Williams & Nelson, 1995; Marshall, 1992).

This paper reports on an investigation of the impact of these socialization practices on new assistant principals, particularly women graduates of one leadership preparation program. The investigation examined the way in which these women were inducted into school leadership. Each graduated from a newly designed preparation program built around state and national standards, focused on teaching and learning as the central role of schools, and committed to collaborative approaches as the best way to achieve shared goals.

The induction of new school leaders often shapes behavior throughout their career (Greenfield, 1985). A pioneering study of the assistant principalship (Marshall, 1992) offered a framework for examining socialization to the role and suggested explicit tasks that shaped the assistant principal's sense of competence and contributed to the way they were viewed by others. The beginning years were found to be defining (Hartzell, Williams & Nelson, 1995). Attitudes developed and responses cultivated during the initial months as an assistant principal greatly influenced behavior patterns and leadership capabilities.

Because the subjects of this study were women, the investigation also explored the impact that gender-associated leadership preferences had on their socialization. Though Eagly, Karau, and Johnson (1992) found significant differences only in the preference for a democratic style and in higher task orientation, other studies suggested additional differences. Shakeshaft (1987a), for instance, suggested that in schools led by women, relationships with others were central. Leaders spent more time with people, communicated more, cared more about individual differences, were more concerned with teachers and marginal students, and devoted greater energy to motivating others. In these schools, teaching and learning was the major focus. Others (Brown & Irby, 1993) continue to explore women as school leaders.

Context of the Study

In the early 1990s North Carolina, like many other states, altered administrator preparation. Based on the recommendations of the Educational Leadership Task Force, the state disestablished all administrator preparation programs and invited campuses of the state university system to submit proposals for creation of a new Master's in School Administration degree (MSA) (Quality Candidate Committee, 1994).

Complementing the disestablishment, the Standards Board for Public School Administration established standards for the licensure of administrators in North Carolina. The Standards Board created a set of ten standards, paralleling the national standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996) that articulated what the state's school leaders should believe, know, and be able to do.

Both the national and state standards emphasized the complexity of the leadership role (Bolman & Deal, 1997), the importance of moral and ethical grounding (Kouzes & Posner, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1992; 1996), the value of working closely with parents and community (Epstein & Salinas, 1993; Prestine,

1991; Sergiovanni, 1994), and the importance of student learning as the primary function of schools (Newman, 1991).

Feminine Perspectives on Leadership

Creating better school leaders is more complex than merely altering preparation programs. It necessitates confronting and altering long standing norms about how principals do their work and also requires cultivating the capacity to resist socialization these old norms.

Questions abound about whether differences in leadership style and preferences are gender related. A meta-analysis of research on gender differences in educational leadership found the key difference to be a preference for a more democratic, participative style (Eagly, Karau, and Johnson, 1992).

Such findings remain clouded by the recognition that there is still a paucity of research on women in educational leadership (Banks, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987a, 1987b). Further, critics appropriately suggest that much of the research about women leaders looks at them through the male lens (Lynch, 1990; Shakeshaft, 1989).

One further complication arises because styles and preferences associated with the "feminine" or the "feminist" do not apply only to women. Perhaps more women than men fit the stereotype, but certainly there are women principals who match the masculine stereotype and men who practice in ways consistent with the feminine. Gender is seen as cultural, not biological. Therefore, when terms like "feminine leadership styles" are used, they refer to both male and female leaders. Even the term "woman" or "women leaders" is meant to be inclusive of all who practice in particular ways.

Without drawing distinct gender lines it is possible to discuss a set of leadership styles and preferences most often associated with the feminine. Those include the preference for democratic rather than autocratic organizations and cultures that are inclusive and collaborative (Eagly, Karau, & Johnson, 1992; Irby & Brown, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987a). In addition, there is support for the

premise that feminine leaders are more attuned to instruction, teachers, and children (Frasher & Frasher, 1979; McGrath, 1992). Finally, there is evidence that because women develop differently, they are more likely to demonstrate an ethic of care that is grounded in relationships rather than laws (Gilligan, 1982, 1985; Porat, 1991; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).

An important assumption embedded in standards for school leaders is that school decisions be based on the best interests of students, both individually and collectively. If women leaders evidence an abiding concern for children, especially for marginal students and those without advocates (Brown & Irby, 1993; Edson, 1987; Lightfoot, 1983) there is correspondence between gender-related preferences in decision making and expectations for contemporary school leaders.

Language choice is another indicator of a more inclusive style. Several studies found that women leaders tend to use more conditional, tentative language (Marshall, 1988). Based on the work of Holmes (1984), Marshall suggests that such language often used by women does not reflect uncertainty but instead is a deliberate effort to invite others into the conversation, to give others a voice.

Clear parallels between standards for school leaders and feminine leadership beliefs, styles, and preferences for practice emerge. Given the alignment it might be suggested that women graduates would have success holding on to what they believe when they transition from preparation into jobs. Perhaps they are better equipped to resist the strong powers of schools as institutions to socialize new leaders into old norms. That question is at the heart of this inquiry.

Role Socialization

While limited research has been conducted on the socialization experiences of new school leaders, there is a long history of research on socialization in other settings (Merton, 1968; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Van

Maanen & Schein, 1979). From these works emerged a definition of socialization. Merton (1968) suggested that socialization is the process whereby one acquired the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to perform a role. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) described it as the "process by which one was taught and learned 'the ropes' of a particular organizational role" (p. 211).

Studies of socialization in educational settings suggest that the process is informal rather than formal, intense and short in duration (Augenstein & Konnert, 1991; Crow, Mecklowitz, Weekes, 1992; Duke, Isaacson, Sagor & Schmuck, 1984; Greenfield, 1985). The informality of the process, coupled with the short duration reflects an emphasis on what Schein (1971) describes as a custodial orientation, an unwillingness to challenge traditional norms for the role.

Researchers also suggested that a major part of socialization is learning the regularities of the job---daily routines and tasks, and coming to grips with the newly assumed role. Gussner (1974) described this as "internalizing" the new role. Marshall (1985) saw the transition differently, describing it as "professional shock."

A study of mid-career socialization identified several factors influencing socialization. They included perceptions of the role by others, the image of the profession and the degree to which the role influenced other occupations, one's personal orientation to the job, family influences, and personal conceptions of the role (Crow, 1993).

The way the principal conceptualizes the role has a significant impact on expectations for an assistant principal. The principal establishes the overall leadership climate in the school, defines areas of responsibility and also evaluates the assistant's work.

Other school personnel, however, also impact socialization. Teachers, secretaries, custodians and other staff hold their own view of how the role "ought to be done." Through their interactions with the assistant, and through their affirmation or lack of affirmation they signal the appropriateness of certain priorities and behaviors (Crow, 1993).

One important issue in role socialization is the degree to which one is willing to challenge long established norms. Schein (1971) identified both custodial and innovative orientations as critical to socialization. The custodial orientation is characterized by "total acceptance on the part of the practitioner of the currently existing norms of that profession " (p. 521). Innovative orientation, on the other hand, involves dissatisfaction with the traditional norms of the profession. Schein suggested that the role innovator was willing to question the focus of professional work and the relationship of the work to others.

More recent studies of socialization in educational settings confirm a continued emphasis on custodial socialization. Reliance on such an approach in the face of newly trained school leaders, schooled in different approaches and emphases, may prove problematic for both schools and school leaders.

The Assistant Principal

Perhaps no other role in school leadership is so fraught with ambiguity and role complexity as that of the assistant principal. For most school leaders, it is the role that they assume upon entry to the field. For many, their experience as an assistant principal shapes and molds their long-term view of school leadership. It is during the assistant principalship when new school leaders are inducted, formally and informally, into the profession. It is during that time that they must face many of the issues they will confront throughout their career. The way they conduct themselves, based on either their own view of leadership, or that espoused by their principal, will shape their career-long response to similar issues (Hartzell, Williams & Nelson, 1995; Marshall, 1992; Marshall & Mitchell, 1991).

Marshall (1985, 1992) developed a model for examining the professional socialization of assistant principals. The model, based on formal and informal components, included formal training such as university programs, and informal elements such as the administrator grapevine for identifying candidates. The

latter component often led to selection of candidates based on a particular selector's preferences for skills and attitudes toward the job.

Even after selection, role socialization continues. Marshall (1985) first identified the notion of "professional shock" for newly hired assistant principals. She identified six tasks required of all new assistant principals. They included defining relationships with teachers, the degree to which the assistant principal engaged in curricular and instructional supervision. Other tasks included dealing with the shock of "seeing things that seem unprofessional, unfair, and wrong" (Marshall, 1992, p. 41), and learning how to navigate through the system to get things done by being a street-level bureaucrat.

Essential to success as an assistant principal was conforming to expected patterns of behavior. They included a commitment to do whatever needs to be done, and to spend as much time as necessary to do it and keeping disputes and disagreements with the principal private. Assistant principals were expected to place primary emphasis on work with students (e.g., discipline, lunchroom, buses, sports and other activities).

Methodology

The data sources used in this study are primary and naturalistic (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The importance of context was reflected in the use of the natural setting as the direct source of data, the researchers as instruments, and students as key informants. Within the context of a standards-centered program, data collection allowed the researchers to explore student perspectives. Student views on their transition to school leadership were collected using surveys, individual and focus group interviews, writing samples and reflections on program preparation. Follow-up interviews provided data about school contexts and graduates' successes in maintaining personal and program-based values in the face of their socialization to new roles.

Preliminary data were collected when the students graduated, through a survey that explored attitudes and perspectives on school leadership and through interviews regarding beliefs about school leadership. Interviews were open-ended, but guided by general questions focused around specific topics. The interviews were used to gather descriptive data in the students' own words so that the researchers could develop insights on how students interpret their role as school leaders. Priority was given to the dynamic and spontaneous nature of each interview and to the development of a trusting relationship between respondent and researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Spradley, 1979; Yin, 1994).

Two years following graduation, after each student had completed a second year as a school leader, they participated in a follow-up survey and completed a Critical Incident Report describing a significant event that shaped their entry to school leadership. Additional data were collected through interviews conducted by the researchers.

A grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to analyze student responses. Such an approach allowed themes to emerge from the analysis of disparate but interconnected data sources. These data, along with the surveys and interviews enhanced understanding of student perspectives and how those perspectives changed as graduates dealt with the effects of socialization.

Analysis of Data

The data collection methods established for this study provided an array of statements, documents, and observations. All information was organized, categorized, analyzed, and synthesized beginning with initial data collection as suggested by Fetterman (1989), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Yin (1994). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) noted "data analysis done simultaneously with data collection enables you to focus and shape the study as it proceeds" (p. 127).

The researchers analyzed the transcribed interviews and a tally of key words or phrases was established. This analysis assisted the researchers in focusing subsequent data analysis activities on these descriptors.

While such studies provide valuable insights into the thinking of the subjects, they are limited in the ability to make generalizations based on their findings. Findings are very context-specific, reflecting the unique orientation of the subjects. Therefore, this study is limited in two ways:

- The information generated by this study, while useful in identifying specific student perspectives on the value of selected administrator preparation programs, is limited by the unique characteristics of the students who participated in the study and the program in which they were enrolled.
- The results of the study are not generalizable and cannot be construed to be applicable to other programs in other locations.

No two individuals experience socialization exactly the same way. Therein lies the dilemma regarding generalizability. While drawing conclusions and making inferences is complex, Creswell (1998) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that it is possible to create meaning and promote understanding of a phenomenon, even though it is embedded in a specific context.

This investigation into the intricacies of role socialization by two cohorts of new school leaders provides an opportunity to learn of their struggles, the tensions between their preparation and their practice, and to identify the strategies they adopted to cope with these tensions. Their story can illuminate our understanding of how school leadership is shaped and molded generation to generation.

Findings

The researchers studied these new school leaders during and after their preparation. During their preparation, the centrality of teaching and learning, democratic leadership, attention to relationships, and decision-making that is

contextual and grounded in an ethic of care were emphasized. Such characteristics are often associated with feminine leadership styles and preferences.

The women in this study saw themselves as practicing such leadership, as "living" leadership that was both consistent with a feminine style and with their preparation. They viewed those preferences as helpful in their transition to leadership (Williamson & Hudson, 2001). The graduates felt both prepared and supported in their efforts to resist socialization to old norms. At the same time, they saw their style preferences and dispositions as potential hindrances.

Preferences for Democratic Organizations and Cultures

Taking care to see gender as cultural rather than biological and to use terms like "feminine leadership styles" to include both female and male leaders, an accepted feminine characteristic is the preference for democratic rather than autocratic organizations and cultures that are inclusive and collaborative (Eagly, Karau, & Johnson, 1992; Irby and Brown, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987a).

Those preferences were evident in the voices of these women. They reported that listening was one way they demonstrated their commitment to an inclusive and collaborative culture. All who mentioned listening saw it as an asset. Noting that "listening communicates caring," one student described how demonstrating that she cared about teachers and their opinions "helped me earn their respect."

By listening well, these women also learned about the school's people, politics and culture. One described the importance of keeping her "ear to the ground." Another described her experience:

> I was in a brand new place, a place I had never worked. I needed to learn the politics, who to ask, who to talk with, how to know when things work or don't work. I watched. I listened. I asked questions like, 'How have things been done traditionally?'

While they learned from watching and listening, these graduates struggled to move toward a new model, usually without totally discounting the old. As one said, "It took a while for folks to develop a level of comfort, to understand that I wasn't challenging everything that had been done." For one, language was part of the solution. As she described, "I was careful about what I said. I was careful not to criticize what had been done in the past, but to choose words like 'refine,' 'strengthen,' or 'enhance.'"

On the other hand, "the old" sometimes had to be discounted and displaced to make room for more democratic organization. One graduate, for instance, found that, "a tight handful of folks ran the school. Others felt like outsiders, like they didn't have a voice. That's what I've had to change... I had to break that power base. I had to spread it out."

These new school leaders saw preferences for inclusive cultures as a means of gaining acceptance by teachers. One, for instance, said she learned from a particularly difficult situation:

> I think this critical incident (among others) showed the teachers and me that I could be there for them and that I sought their input and expertise. I began to see that there were no magic solutions. By addressing issues in a steady, reflective, inclusive manner, difficult situations will improve over time.

Another student found that the reality of her first job matched her expectations. She had set out to practice with "the golden rule as my foundation." She discovered that, "stakeholders want to be heard, to learn, to have guidance, to be appreciated, to be a part of a successful school." Her challenge was to "be a leader who models behaviors that correlate with these beliefs," whose practice honored her commitment to a democratic and inclusive organization.

Attention to Instruction, Teachers, and Children

There is support for the premise that feminine leaders are more attuned to instruction, teachers, and children (Andrews & Basom, 1990; Charters & Jocick, 1981; Frasher & Frasher, 1979; McGrath, 1992; Pavan & Reid, 1994). Women leaders tend to evidence a special and abiding concern for marginal children and those without advocates (Brown & Irby, 1993; Edson, 1987; Lightfoot, 1983).

The women in this study saw the feminine knowledge of and interest in teaching and learning as a significant asset. Though there was some early teacher resistance to the new leaders' involvement at the classroom level, it was typically short-lived. Quickly, that involvement was perceived as an indicator of caring—about teachers, teaching and learning, and students. As one student described her acceptance,

> I think I have a good relationship with the staff. There are some excellent teachers here, though not all have the same work ethic that I had. It has to do with having been a teacher for a long time. I can identify with them. But it has to do with being female, too. It seems to me that women just naturally build relationships quicker than men.

One graduate described the view she held of the assistant principal when a teacher, "When I saw an assistant principal coming, I turned and went in another direction. It was always about discipline, an observation, or to ask for something." It did not surprise her, therefore, that teachers were initially cautious. Quickly, however, they came to welcome her and to believe that she cared about what was going on in the classroom. "Now," she reported, "people don't turn around and go the other way when I come."

On the contrary, many graduates reported that teachers had come to appreciate their focus on the classroom and children. One woman, for instance, described the detailed, data-driven feedback she gave teachers following observations. Rather than resent her attention to instructional practices, teachers responded with, "Wow, I've never gotten such feedback." Other

examples of teacher appreciation were revealed in comments like, "You're doing a great job," or "I really appreciate the way you handled that for me."

Another graduate described how her nurturing and caring helped. Seemingly "easy" practices like notes in teachers' boxes, special little gifts, and personalized messages "created a special kind of atmosphere."

Caring for children was also a common theme. One graduate described her practice:

> There is a lot of nurturing going on. I stand out at the bus stop every morning and put my hand up and help every child down and say, 'Good morning.' I know them by name. I try to show them warmth and caring. It's important to start the day with those children, to let them know I care about them.

Such caring was exemplified across school levels. A middle school assistant principal, for instance, recalled that her platform stressed, "What is in the best interest of the student?" Verbalizing that question with her mentor helped her "make decisions among a huge world of options." A high school assistant principal, teased about her "feminine" approaches to students, replied, "They're the same kids you have in elementary; they're just taller."

Caring about teaching, learning, and children also led to additional stresses and workload. Recognizing that a teacher's inadequate performance was at the heart of a child's "discipline" problem required time-consuming teacher conferences and re-teaching. When excessive adult absences were limiting learning, time to document the problem and eventually counsel the adult out of education had to be allocated. Both of these problems had previously been ignored to "avoid conflict."

New leaders whose practice was grounded in teaching and learning could not ignore them. Their concern for children enabled them to resist the "avoid conflict" norm and move toward new ones.

Ethic of Care Grounded in Relationships

There is evidence that because women develop differently, they are more likely to demonstrate an ethic of care grounded in relationships rather than laws (Gilligan, 1982, 1985; Porat, 1991; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). In her model for a feminine view of power, Hudson (1993) identified attention to relational issues within schools characterized by community.

A family metaphor described the school for a typical graduate: [In spite of our differences], "we still see ourselves, all of us, as a family. We say it. We talk about the [school] family. We agree to overlook some things...not to let small differences become a big deal."

For these graduates, listening was a tangible manifestation of the value they placed on people and relationships. Through listening, they conveyed caring about others, that they valued the dissonant voice as well as the mainstream.

After some early skepticism, teachers and parents appreciated the listening demonstrated by these women. One graduate who felt some early discrimination because of her age, found that listening, offers of support and assistance, and calm and consistent responses served her well. Through such practices, this young woman said, "I earned credibility. Now teachers and parents say 'Thank you for being consistent and calm.'"

Another graduate described a parent conference, which included, "this big, burly man who happened to be the child's father, but didn't live with the family." She continued:

> I treated him with respect and asked their opinion. I showed I cared about what happened to their son. We wanted to try to work out what we could do that would best help him. We would make modifications and do whatever was necessary to help him. The father was about to cry by the end of the conference. He said, 'I've never had a conference like that. I can tell that you really care about my son and you really care what we think.' He was shocked.

Such active listening also can be misinterpreted. For instance, one leader struggled with the misperception by others that "listening means I agree." Attentive, active listening can be misconstrued; perhaps because it is a "new norm," one to which others in the school are not accustomed. One woman spoke of a teacher who felt she had been heard, who felt "validated" and "recognized" in a budget discussion. The teacher was most surprised and hurt when the assistant principal later argued against spending money the way the teacher wanted. Emotionally, the teacher "cornered" the assistant principal and attacked with, "I can't believe you would sway people like that. I thought you were listening to me."

Care for the marginal student (Shakeshaft, 1987b), associated with the feminine, is revealed in the stories of these women. One graduate insisted that students could not be ignored simply because they were poor, lacked academic talents, or could not speak English. In her mind, "There are not an acceptable number of casualties."

Another works in a poor school with high unemployment and poverty. Most of her students often come to school hungry. This woman, now a principal, worked with the cafeteria manager to ensure that on Mondays and Fridays, the children were served "larger than prescribed" portions because there was little to eat on weekends.

In another school, the rules were stretched to get a student with a drug arrest back in school because at home, "her uncles were using her to distribute and her grandmother is too old and too powerless to care." Instead of letting the student drop out, the school "created an opportunity" for the student to use a learning lab and an experimental on-line service to continue her education.

Such actions emerged from a commitment to, "look at kids individually, to personalize the high school setting, to serve the kids that we know right here." As a result,

> We've changed policies, we've created options for earning credits, we've changed how credits are assigned, we've changed courses, we've hand

scheduled algebra 1B students to match students' and teachers' personalities, we've bought pantyhose for the prom, we've fed kids, and on and on.

The ethic of care emerged as an asset. Though early in their career, many of these women reported that others had come to trust their decision-making. One graduate, attending to a high school student's special needs, advocated giving the student an incomplete rather than a failing grade. As she described it, "Such a thing had never been done and I thought the faculty would mutiny." Because they had come to trust her decision making, however, the faculty not only accepted the change, "they bought into it."

Many also reported that others knew and appreciated that their decisions were grounded in what was right, not necessarily what was legal. One graduate described an encounter with a student who had a drug problem. She offered the student three options: she could "play" the assistant principal (with legal implications), an educator with substance abuse expertise, or "mom." The student chose "mom." In the end, her "goal was accomplished. The student got some help." In this and similar cases, others affected could not know all the details. Even so, the woman reported that people came to respect decisions that they knew were based on students' best interests rather than just policy.

Caring grounded in relationships, the feeling of family is important to these women. One enjoyed being an assistant principal because it "keeps me in a support role. I've been a mom far longer than I've been an administrator." Though "ready" in many respects, she was reluctant to accept a principalship for fear of losing that role.

Inclusive and Invitational Language

Inclusive practices within the school and its community are both program emphases and characteristics of a feminine style. Such an inclusive style is reflected in language. Several studies found that women leaders use more conditional, tentative language (Marshall, 1988). Based on the work of Holmes

(1984), Marshall suggests that such language used by women does not reflect uncertainty. Instead, it is a deliberate effort to invite others into the conversation, to give others a voice.

One graduate, in her first principalship, moved toward consensus by saying to teachers, "You don't have to love it, but can you live with it?" A like-minded colleague said,

> You cannot be a dictator in a school. You have to work with people. You cannot force anything down anybody's throat. You have to listen. Everybody has strengths and they can all add to the team. It takes all of us working together. In the end, teachers have to think it's right.

Slight shifts in language make a difference. As an assistant principal, one student described her principal's strategy for dealing with an angry parent who threatened to call the superintendent. He said, "Go right ahead. It won't do you any good." Faced with a similar situation as a principal, the graduate chose a different path. When a parent made the same threat, she replied, "That certainly is your right. Here's the number."

Another student saw her commitment to communication, to seeking and giving feedback as a key to acceptance by teachers. It was not long, she said, until teachers began to "feel comfortable coming to me and asking for things."

On the other hand, some of the women feared that inclusive, invitational language could be "read" as uncertainty. One described her approach:

> You don't have to rant and rave to be firm and get your point across. I'm careful that my 'calm' is not seen as a sign of weakness. I listen and respond, but I also need to be assertive occasionally. Language is important. I'll say 'No, that's not going to happen, but here's what we can do.' They need to know I listened.

Feminine as Helpful, but not Enough

The women in this study perceived their feminine styles and preferences as more an asset than a liability. One student reported that her supervisor agreed.

An experienced central office administrator, citing their eye for detail, caring, nurturing, and involvement in all aspects of school life, shared that, "My best principals have always been women."

Those feminine preferences, however, were not seen as sufficient. While important, none saw those predispositions as "enough" to ensure their success as a school leader. One student, for instance, remembered the platform she wrote as a student:

> It started with, 'Love and respect will be the principles that affect me most deeply.' Everyday, those two words come up for me. Even my moment of silence starts with, 'Help me to do all things through love,' because you can get real caught up in being angry or getting your feelings hurt. I am this, but it is much more complicated.

To be sufficient, more than feminine preferences is required. As one women said, "It is ultimately how you deliver that matters." Another woman described it this way,

> Everybody comes to me and asks me the hard questions. They want to come to me. I think it's the female thing. Part of why people come to me is that they know there will be appropriate follow-up. While teachers appreciate the fact that I listen to them, there is more. They know that I will follow up on their questions and requests, and they really appreciate that. That's more style than gender.

Another graduate, working with a male principal, said, "I brought a real compassionate side to this team. Sometimes [the principal] forgets that people need time to process things, that people have feelings." On the other hand, she said she could not afford to be perceived "as a softie" and worked hard to "appear confident and competent."

At times, "delivering" means setting aside personal preferences. One student described having to tell middle school teachers to turn off classroom televisions on September 11. Though she disagreed, she communicated the principal's decision. Reflecting on the situation, she concluded that the most

important thing is, "for that administrative team to be just that, a team. In that case, my personal conviction took a back seat. If it's not one of those 'hills to die on,' you just let it go...and I haven't had a hill to die on yet."

At other times, "delivering" means deliberately choosing to act in ways inconsistent with personal preferences. One new principal described herself as "a firm believer in site-based decision making," but found:

> It had "been carried too far. Teachers were making all the decisions, not based on data. They were making decisions based on what was easy. They bought into programs, not sound teaching philosophy. So I said, 'This is the way it's going to be next year. These are the changes I plan to make. If you don't like it, you've got plenty of time to find another job so I can hire somebody that can buy into the program.' I had six teachers leave. I still believe that if I had come in here all sweet and nice and patting them on the back, it would be just like it was last year. Nothing would have changed.

In this and similar instances, students had to choose among preferences. Because she cared about students, because she valued good teaching, this woman temporarily "gave up" her commitment to a democratic organization. She believed that she had to put aside her predispositions to be successful in this setting.

As another student described the dilemma, "I know what works: inviting ownership, engaging people in the things that need to happen. But sometimes, you have to mandate—that's the nature of the job."

The Toll of the Feminine

These women saw their feminine preferences as an asset. Yet they also acknowledged that those preferences took a toll, both personal and professional.

Some of the women experienced blatant and unpleasant behavior based on gender. Several described incidents in which old male-dominated norms came face to face with women who saw themselves and their leadership practices quite differently.

One woman assuming her first principalship in a small district of "good ol' boys" encountered demeaning comments like, "Don't worry your pretty little head." Another, being interviewed for a high school principalship, heard, "You have a petite build. Are these kids...do you find it intimidating?"

Another woman detected more subtle discrimination in interactions with a district "superior" whose job included mentoring new leaders. She asked for feedback about why she was not offered a principalship.

> The director told me that I was the best candidate but because I was a woman and white, I wasn't offered the job. When I informed her that I was unhappy with that decision and would consider moving, her reply was, 'I didn't realize you were mobile. You have a family.' I felt insulted, as though because I'm a woman I'm place bound because of my spouse. How little do they know!

More frequently, the women in this study experienced a more subtle "testing." Some of their feminine preferences were questioned. Their responses chronicled the experience. One, for instance, described colleagues who derided her efforts to decorate her high school to make it "warm and inviting." Another wrestled with the need to "be more assertive." Still another commented, "I needed to act aggressive to show I wasn't a wimp."

Another example emerged from an instance where a graduate successfully dealt with an angry parent and "disarmed" a potentially volatile situation. While she felt good about the outcome, she was careful that her calm demeanor "was not seen as a sign of weakness." Reflecting on her early experiences, another wondered if she needed to "act more male."

Another woman expressed concern that her feminine preferences were sometimes perceived as "weak" or indecisive. When she began as a school leader committed to collaboration, she wondered, "Are they going to see that as wishy-washy?" When a teacher brought a discipline problem to her attention, she frequently asked, "What are you looking for?" Yet she feared that such

intentional inclusion might be perceived as weak. As a result, this graduate felt she needed to consciously avoid "being a wimp."

The ethic of care associated with the feminine also took a toll on these new leaders. Studies of leaders found that ambition, position power, and prestige were less important motivators for women than for men (Helgeson, 1990; Neuse, 1978; Stamm & Ryff, 1984). The experience of these women confirmed that finding. What mattered to them were service and the personal and professional fulfillment that comes with "making a difference."

Care for the marginal student was a hallmark of these women. Such caring took a toll, however. One woman described an incident where police were called to remove an "out of control" student.

> As I watched them shackle him, hands and feet, to the back seat of the police cruiser and leave to take him home, I wondered what kind of madness I had stepped into. It was a heartbreaking experience. It was not the first time nor would it be the last. I prayed for help for the boy and strength for myself and went on to the next emergency.

Care for students and quality teaching led directly to an activity that took a large toll on these women-- dealing with personnel whose work was not consistent with either. One described the experience as, "a kind of torment you will have to go through." Another described a conference with an employee:

> I had to say, 'I'm going to start documenting what you're not doing.' I was very kind, but I was firm. There were tears and excuses. Finally, I had to say, 'I understand all that, but here's the bottom line.

The toll associated with caring generated concern. Several of these women expressed that, "the principalship is a lonely job," and they asked, "Is it worth it?" Another wondered, "Given how I have to spend so much of my time, can I really make a difference?" As one new principal described her experience with doubt:

> When I walk into a classroom and it's not the best teacher, I want to teach...I miss it. I know I will not always do this job...Somewhere along the line, I'll go

> back to the classroom. There is such a challenge here; there is so much to be done. You want to do it all right now, but you know you can't. It is a very humbling role. If you ever thought you were superwoman, you know you're not.

These women are competent, confident, and caring. They are good at what they are doing. Yet several have begun to second-guess their decision to become a school leader. They resist socialization to old norms and are truly "living" leadership styles consistent with the feminine. But they are concerned about the cost.

As one of them put it, "Is this really how I want to spend my time?" Another, under some pressure to accept a principalship, commented, "It's not that I can't or that I don't feel prepared. It's just, 'Do I want to?' I'm not sure I really want to. There are more important things than ambition." Another says, "I'll be one [a principal]. I'm not in a rush. I don't have to have all the power and all the decisions to make. It's a balancing act...and you have to learn to balance."

Others of the women are confident they have made the right career choice. One, for instance, attributed part of her early success as a principal to "being accessible." Yet she also saw that, "being too accessible is also a weakness. It makes it hard to take care of me...but, looking back, I wouldn't change it." Another described it:

> This year, life is good. I am doing what I should be doing...you know how you wonder. I really like this. I told my dad, 'If I won the lottery, I think I'd still do this.' That's how comfortable I am with it. I'm a better person for it. I'm growing because of it.

Conclusion

Feminine preferences in leadership align closely with expectations for contemporary school leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). The women in this study graduated from a preparation program closely aligned with

these expectations. It emphasized the centrality of teaching and learning, the importance of democratic and inclusive organizations and cultures, decisions grounded in an ethic of care, and the importance of context and relationships.

Because all these women had very similar preparation, further study is needed to explore why some graduates are second guessing their decisions to become school leaders and others are not. At the same time, this study demonstrated that such preparation could, indeed, serve graduates when they begin their careers as school leaders.

One respondent described the importance of reflection, in her preparation and in her work: "That really helped me. You helped me think about who I am and what matters to me—if you don't know that, then you're constantly trying to be someone else or you don't quite get defined in your position."

Such preparation is essential. But, there is a need for more.

For those who prepare future leaders, it is important to acknowledge the power of socialization to mold and shape behavior. Beyond acknowledgement, preparation programs must help students create the capacity to anticipate and resist such socialization. They must help students learn to balance their care for others with care for themselves, to find a working balance between competence and burnout. One student described her emerging success:

> I see that I try to balance personal responsibility and passion with realism. There comes a point when I must recognize that I have done all I can do for today, when I must go home or to the gym, call a friend, or do something to rejuvenate myself. I remind myself each day that this job is challenging and unpredictable. It will never be 'done.' I am not God, I am not responsible for everything, I have limitations. I am learning to put emotional and physical limits on what I do. That is the reason I love it and one of the reasons I am called to it.

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